

7 Paradigms the Church Must Restore to Impact Society

The original church followed a biblical pattern to fulfill the Great Commission and impact the world. Through the years, the church lost its salt because it altered seven essential paradigms.

The following are seven paradigms the church must restore to impact society

1. The Restoration of Theological Education Through the Church

A long time ago I came to the conclusion that I was primarily called to be a theologian “of the church for the church” instead of merely an academic theologian. Consequently, my focus has been to practically influence the church more than trying to have a voice in academia.

Academic theologians are a blessing and necessary to uphold and explain biblical faith—but are often viewed as professionals who serve an entity (a university) that is separate and distinct from the local church. Academia in general has been a syncretistic construct influenced more by the enlightenment (in terms of the verification of truth by the empirical scientific method) as well as the Greek philosophical academy of the second-century onward (when Christian apologists attempted to show the superiority of Christianity to the Hellenistic culture by adopting Greek philosophical language and methods to preach and defend the gospel).

However, the New Testament model of doing theology is found in the trenches of the local church. The apostle Paul made disciples and trained Christ followers, like Timothy, in the context of the churches he was founding and overseeing. When we separate theology from the church, it is often impractical

to the average church member and is only relevant for those called to be professional church ministers. I believe God is now changing this paradigm and bringing non-formal biblical education back to the local church. This does not eradicate seminaries but redefines their role as an entity that exists solely to supply the local church with resources—instead of an entity in and of itself.

This is a huge paradigm shift that many academic institutions will fight tooth and nail out of fear they will lose their jobs. However, the highest goal of educators in the church should be to aid local congregations—not replace congregations as the primary vehicle for biblical training.

2. The Role of the Pastor

As we examine the New Testament pattern of shepherd, we find that pastor/teacher is one of the cluster gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Their primary objective is not “to do the work of the ministry” but to place and equip the saints for the work of the ministry (4:12). This puts more of a burden on secondary leaders like elders, deacons, and committed members, since they should be the primary leaders edifying and ministering to the congregation (instead of the lead pastor). This is a huge paradigm shift that must take place in order for church leadership to maximize and fulfill their divine purpose.

3. Missionary Agencies and the Role of the Church

The mission of the church should never be exported to mission agencies and parachurch entities. When we read the Bible, the primary reason for the church was to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, 9). There was never a separate mission agency but a holistic understanding of the inextricable, organic integration between the local church: evangelization and multiplication. This huge paradigm shift means that mission agencies should become arms of the local

church and not vice versa!

This shift away from missionary agencies will enable indigenous churches to understand their stewardship of the gospel and be responsible for equipping Christ-followers to go to all the world and preach the Good News! Paul understood that his ability to spread the gospel was dependent upon the church being established and strengthened (2 Corinthians 10:10-14). The notion of a separate entity fulfilling this role was foreign to the biblical narrative.

4. The Apostolic Versus the Contemporary Church

The typical local church is only focused on its own congregation and its own community. The apostolic church of the New Testament was constantly on the move and expanding and multiplying disciples and churches. Furthermore, the local churches were always connected to a global vision by partnering with their apostolic leader to reach the world.

The apostle Paul had about 35 people mentioned in the book of Acts who traveled with him, and all of them came from the local churches he founded. Hence, the church (the modality) was focused locally but participated globally while the apostolic leader had a global focus (sodality) with local participation.

Contrary to this New Testament pattern, the contemporary church is usually led by pastors who only have a local focus and send church members off to a missionary enterprise if they sense a global call. For the church to bless the world it needs a huge paradigm shift towards the first century apostolic church.

5. Leadership Development

The present-day Protestant church usually sends aspiring church leaders to seminary or Bible college to matriculate towards ordination. Hence, our M.O. is to farm people out of

their native and church context and train leaders through academic study and tests. This leadership competency is separated from the grid of character development experienced in the cauldron of a congregation. However, the original church that turned the world upside down (Acts 17, 7, 8) didn't utilize separate entities such as a Bible school to train leaders. They also didn't depend upon parachurch organizations to make disciples and train leaders.

Emerging leaders were nurtured while serving in the context of the local church and managing their biological families (1 Tim. 3:1-8). They were also equipped by a leader functioning in one of the cluster gifts (mentioned in Eph. 4:11). The Pauline method for leadership development is summarized in 2 Tim. 2:2 and modeled throughout the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul.

Furthermore, the present-day church has demonstrated for the past several decades that it will never reach the world with clever marketing schemes and large crowds. The body of Christ needs a paradigm shift towards the New Testament pattern of church-centric leadership development if it wants to experience biblical results.

6. The Church and the Kingdom

Jesus taught us to pray for His kingdom to come—not for His church to come (Luke 11:2-4). The kingdom of God is the reign of God that emanates from the throne of God. The church is not the kingdom, but the main agent of the kingdom to represent God as salt and light to this world. Unfortunately, most pastors and churches don't understand this and merely focus on the needs of their congregation.

The church will never reach the world until it experiences a dramatic paradigm shift and embraces their call to manifest the reign of God in every aspect of culture—from Monday to Saturday, not merely on Sunday.

7. Embracing the Five Cluster Gifts

A few centuries after the birth of Christianity the church gradually went from being led by apostolic and prophetic leaders to being led by pastors and teachers. God set first in the church apostles (1 Cor. 12:28,29) because they have a pioneering spirit and are always expanding kingdom influence for God.

The primary concern of pastors is not expansion but protection and care. Consequently, when the pastoral gift became the predominant leader in local churches the missionary expansion and entrepreneurial spirit was slowed down. (Of course, all five cluster gifts have always existed in church history; however, the lack of understanding and nurture of apostolic leadership hindered both her mindset and ability to evangelize the world.) For the church to fulfill its Great Commission mandate of Matthew 28:19, she has to have a paradigm shift and once again embrace all five of the cluster gifts found in Ephesians 4:1. It is not a threefold ministry gift but a fivefold ministry gift we need to equip the saints to reach the world.

My prayer is that these seven paradigms will soon be restored to the church so we can manifest the reign of God in earth as it is in heaven.